



Learning and Development in Central Government:

2023 Trends & Future Challenges



www.moderngov.com

 Understanding ModernGov



Forward	3
Executive Summary	4
Understanding Learning Needs	5
Learning and Development Hurdles	8
Training Trends in 2023 and Beyond	12
Conclusions	16
Credits	17

Foreword

As the drive for greater efficiencies and stronger public services continues, central government departments must continue to adapt and focus on the way they develop the people who keep these core functions running.

By prioritising continuous learning and development, departments can meet ever-changing staff needs and equip them with the tools, techniques and skills they need to succeed in their roles.

Those departments that deliver effective training for their employees can:

- Fill skills gaps that could be compromising service quality
- Develop a knowledge-sharing culture across organisations that creates space for innovation
- Increase productivity and morale
- Recruit and retain the right staff to keep up with increasing competition from the private sector in the 'fight for talent'

But what training is working? And what hurdles do we need to get over for effective learning?

We conducted a survey to learn about the present and future landscape of learning and development in the Civil Service.

We spoke to L&D professionals from 93% of all ministerial and non-ministerial government departments to find out what drives training, top L&D challenges and emerging trends that could have a big impact on roles in the future.

We hope this white paper creates conversations and helps departments focus on how they run and measure training in the future. Please share any thoughts you have with us.

The Understanding ModernGov Team

Executive Summary

At its core, the public sector relies on its people. And one of the biggest challenges for L&D teams is the ability to develop an ever-growing workforce and address skills gaps as they arise – all within tight budgets.

52%

52% of L&D decision-makers said the number of staff in their department has increased in the past 12 months.

53%

When asked about training budgets, **53%** stated theirs remained unchanged in 2023 compared to the previous year.

25%

25% expressed concerns about 'lacking' budgets.

As staff levels rise but training budgets remain the same, L&D professionals face pressure to provide the same level of high-quality training and development opportunities that match the right employees' needs.

To meet these challenges, L&D professionals must:

- ✓ Optimise L&D funding and use it to draw quality outcomes for staff and the department
- ✓ Embrace the demand for skill development to keep employee retention high
- ✓ Avoid running training that doesn't address vital skills gaps

62%

62% of L&D professionals said their L&D team size remained the same in the past year, but...

44%

44% said they have increased responsibility as they manage the entire training budget for all job titles across their department.

This reflects the need to understand what training formats are working, how to measure their impact and develop a strategy that closes the gaps of specialist and core soft skills for the present and future.

Understanding Training Needs

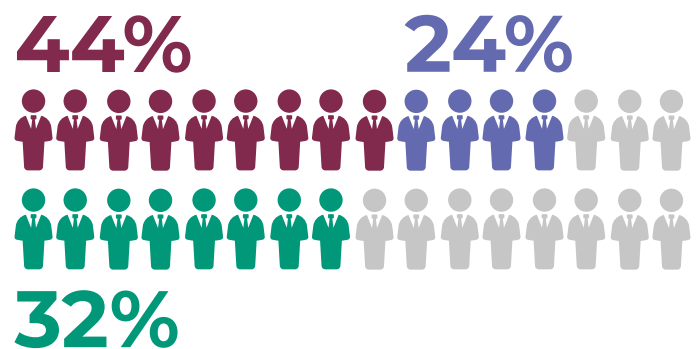
With technological advancements and a tighter strain on public services, how can L&D teams ensure their staff can keep up with demand in an ever-changing work environment through training?

Our survey found that although 44% of L&D professionals we spoke to manage all the training budget, a quarter (24%) of respondents said staff can spend the training budget as they please. And 32% stated that individuals can select their training preferences which are then approved by the L&D team.

These results demonstrate that public sector professionals have more of an input on the training they attend and what they need to improve their skills. In addition to this, when asked about specific amounts for annual training budgets, 52% of respondents said they don't have it set up and that it's needs-based.

Is this an effective way to run continuous high-quality training throughout the year?

One advantage of running needs-based training is the ability to be flexible with new skill needs, but could planning training ahead boost retention or save spending and approval time?



Do all Departments Use Needs-Based Training?

When we asked L&D decision-makers how they identify training needs for their staff, the top two answers were through staff performance reviews (74%) and from requests from staff (72%). With 74% of L&D teams using individual staff performance as an indicator for training gaps, clear goals or metrics must be put in place for this to be an effective method.

The second top answer, requests from staff, demonstrates that L&D decision-makers are taking more time to understand employee needs, hear their opinion on current training and how to improve what's on offer. But with increasing staff numbers, do L&D teams have the scope to create learner-centred training plans for every individual or job role? And how can we gauge how much training is enough?

How Are Training Needs Identified?



74%

Staff performance reviews



72%

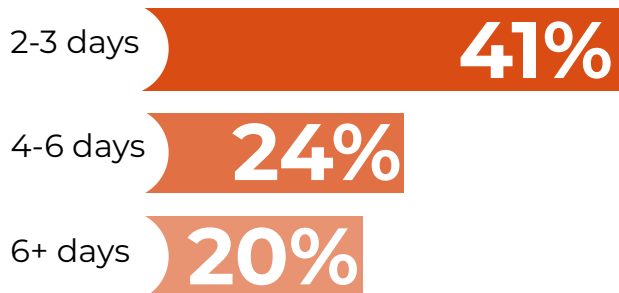
Requests from staff



How Much Training do Staff Need?

This is decided on individual and departmental needs, context and the demands of specific roles. But, are civil servants getting enough training to improve and develop their skills?

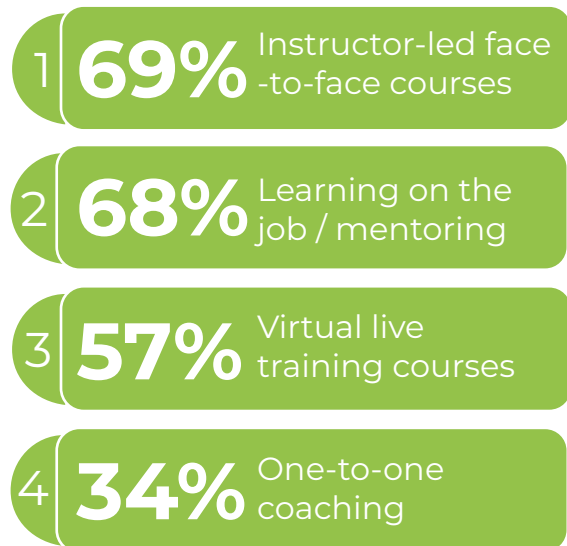
Number of Days Spent Attending Training in 12 Months



What Training Formats Work?

Of these days spent receiving training; we asked L&D professionals which training formats they found most effective.

Four Most Effective Training Formats



The pandemic necessitated an abrupt shift in remote and online work settings which forced the delivery of training to adapt. Although virtual training offers greater flexibility, cost savings and convenience for staff, L&D teams believe that face-to-face training is the most interactive and offers the greatest impact.

Today's workforce is more and more focused on their own learning and personal development, with learning on the job and mentoring on the rise. Both formats can improve retention by offering insights into how other job roles function. Learning on the job and mentoring requires little upfront investment, but for it to be effective, the more experienced individual needs to have strong skills in place.



Learning and Development Hurdles

L&D teams are committed to the learning and development of staff in the Civil Service, but there are a variety of hurdles and challenges that need to be addressed along the way.

Top 4 Obstacles for Securing Training

Multiple choice question



Our results show that one of the biggest barriers to learning across government departments is not having or making enough time for learning. With already over-stretched workloads and reduced headcounts still recovering from the pandemic, taking the time to attend training is less of a priority. Working from home can also create barriers to learning if L&D teams wish for employees to attend face-to-face training.

A lack of time and restrictive procurement constraints make creating a learning culture more difficult and puts pressure on the training quality to engage staff and create positive outcomes every time.

L&D Challenges Across the Civil Service

Given these obstacles, many L&D teams are evaluating their training offerings and are on the lookout for solutions. But, aside from securing training, these teams also face other challenges that can directly impact service quality and departmental morale.

When we asked L&D professionals what biggest L&D challenges their department is facing, these were the top three answers mentioned by most:

Biggest Challenges Facing L&D Professionals

Multiple choice question



As economic conditions change, skills shortages emerge and organisations transform, the need to recruit, retain and upskill staff has increased. This need to upskill to retain public sector staff is due to the increasing financial competition from the private sector. According to Statista, the average weekly earnings of public sector staff fell far behind the private sector every month in 2022. This has intensified the competition for good staff and the difficulty to retain staff. To combat this, the Civil Service need to play a proactive role in understanding what makes staff stay in roles and how to adapt their approach to recruitment and upskilling the workforce.

The pandemic forced many organisations to act on employee wellbeing due to the cultural shift where staff look for work environments that actively promote wellbeing and psychological safety. A big role in improving staff wellbeing is ensuring all senior leaders are aware of the importance of workplace health and wellbeing. L&D teams can do this through evidence-based understanding of the causes of absence and any unhealthy practices in the department.

The Civil Service needs managers who can lead the way during uncertain times and teams who are willing to learn and adapt to new situations. Unless the underlying issues are addressed and policies are tailored to the specific department needs, these efforts to improve staff wellbeing and resilience won't make a lasting impact.

To ensure the maximum effectiveness of wellbeing and resilience training, L&D teams should steer clear of treating it as a tick boxing exercise as it risks being meaningless and even ineffective. By offering tailored and personalised training that addresses specific needs of each team, the impact on staff can be more profound and long-lasting.

L&D decision-makers shared the specific challenges facing their organisation:

“ The ability to carve out time to carry out training programmes is one of our challenges. We struggle to ensure that legislative / compliance training is completed and so employee development is currently not very prevalent. ”

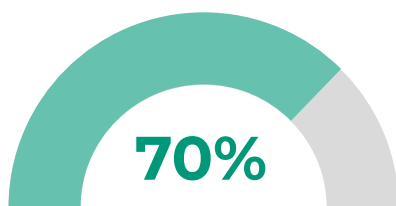
“ The de-prioritisation of learning in the current staffing and economic climate and the continuous need to try to demonstrate ROI. ”

“ Purchasing externally takes months of business cases and decision making higher up the organisation to get approval – it’s such a struggle and so time consuming. ”

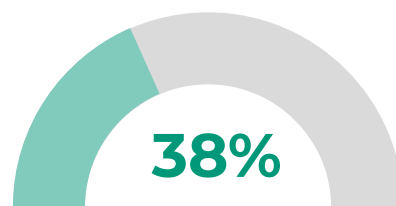
How is the Effectiveness of Training Measured?

As employees have a greater influence over what training they attend, it’s up to L&D teams to use metrics to analyse the effectiveness of training and how it impacts department and organisational goals.

Ways L&D Teams Measure the Impact of Training



Self-assessment feedback



Manager Evaluation



It isn't measured

Self-assessment feedback is a great opportunity to hear thoughts directly from those who attended the course and can offer insights into what other training they would like to see. However, often feedback is not built into the training itself and treated as an afterthought. This can result in a lack of consistency across all departments and means training can go unmeasured.

One way to avoid this is through management evaluation or 'post-training job performance', which 38% of L&D decision-makers said they prefer to use to measure the impact of training. One important part of using manager evaluation is to set direct goals, metrics or factors to measure success before training begins. This not only helps avoid biases, but also helps report on the value of the training to senior leaders.

Not all L&D decision-makers we surveyed spoke about measuring training. In fact, a quarter of respondents (25%) said they don't currently measure the effectiveness of the training they run. This demonstrates a clear gap in understanding what training works, how it's helping the department reach goals and ensuring staff are properly equipped to thrive in their roles.

L&D teams should aim to use a variety of metrics to gain a rounded view of the effectiveness of training. From quantitative and qualitative metrics to more experience-based ones, instead of using a mechanical tick boxing process, L&D managers should aim to add empathy and understanding to their evaluation. The more data you collect on measurable outcomes, the easier it will be to plan future training, see how the training has impacted employee ROI and whether employees believe it's helping them improve.



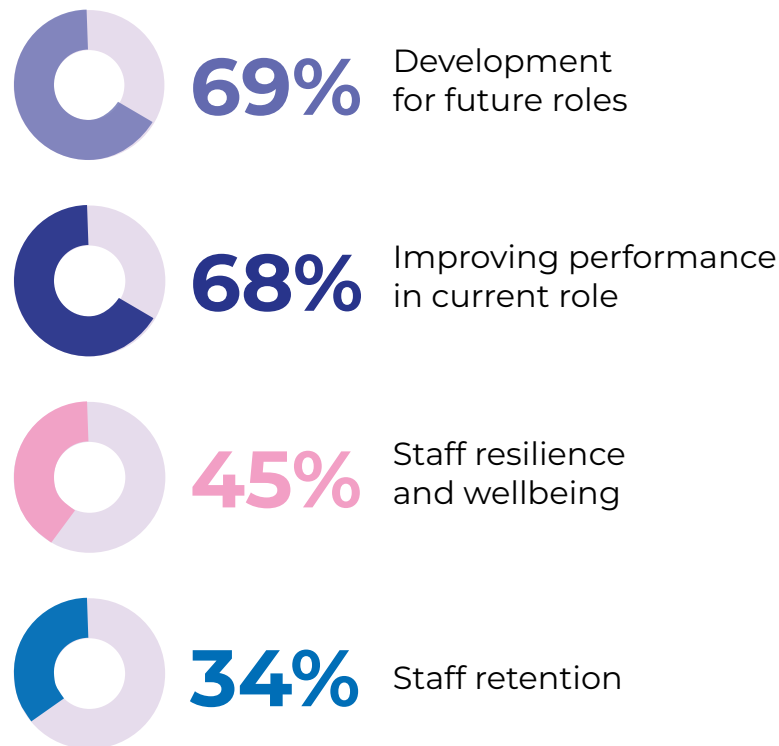
Training Trends in 2023 and Beyond

L&D teams are tasked with equipping civil servants with quality training. But what's the main reason behind running training, topic focus in 2023 and what future trends do L&D decision-makers see as a priority?

Before we dive into the trends, we asked L&D decision-makers what are the most valuable purposes behind running training for their organisation.

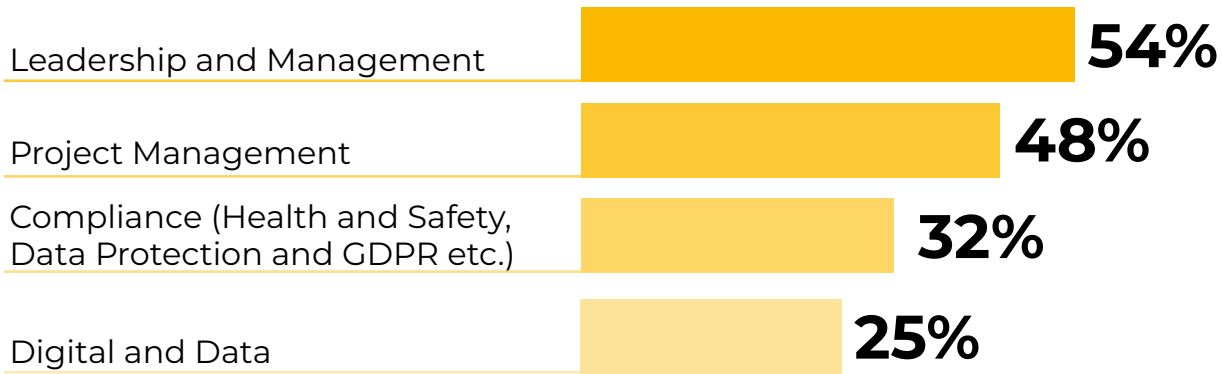
Most Valuable Training Purposes Behind Running Training

Multiple choice question



All four valuable purposes are focused on developing a stronger workforce. By prioritising development for future roles and improving performance for current ones, L&D teams can develop staff and mould their skillset to fit into future roles or needs. By doing both, L&D teams move one step closer towards meeting increasing year-on-year demands and pressures.

Staff Received the Most Training in



Although compliance training is vital for keeping employees up to date, it should be used to teach staff how to perceive and think through situations that may occur.

Compliance training can set the foundation for training on other topics, such as project management, communication skills and leadership training.

We also asked L&D professionals to identify their top five focus areas for 2023:

Top 5 L&D Focus Areas for 2023



Four out of five top focus areas relate to soft skills which include communication, listening, leadership skills and emotional intelligence. With ever-changing public demands and government plans and commitments to meet, departments have identified the need for investment in developing strong, agile leaders who have a modern view on how to motivate teams and create a shared purpose to achieve outcomes for the public.



Aside from 2023, we need to look ahead. What are the top five emerging trends in the public sector that L&D decision-makers think will have the biggest impact on roles in the next 5-10 years?

60%



Upskilling and reskilling staff

As one of the three biggest challenges faced by L&D teams, upskilling and reskilling is high on the priorities list. In previous years, public sector processes for hiring and retaining staff have been criticised – especially when it comes to filling talent gaps. By prioritising upskilling and reskilling staff, departments can fill critical skills gaps, boost retention and create a culture of continuous learning and development.

58%



Growth in technology

With 58% of L&D decision-makers see keeping pace with new technological developments an emerging trend, departments must invest in training that is inclusive to all, valuable for employees and demonstrates direct outcomes. As technology becomes more accessible, training must evolve with it to ensure central government continues to move with inevitable technological changes.

56%



Increased pressure on public services

As we gain a greater ageing population, more people needing faster government services and a worsening UK labour supply, the public sector won't be able to meet these increasing demands through recruitment alone. To meet these pressures, L&D decision-makers must analyse their team to discover if there's untapped potential and how to enhance their skills.

Well-trained employees have the skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality services to the public. This not only enhances the overall efficiency of the service but also ensures that public needs are met.

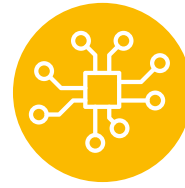
48%



Use of AI tools

With increasing access to AI tools, the Civil Service are presented with two key opportunities. The first being to teach the workforce how to use these tools to improve their day-to-day tasks. And the second, using AI to transform public services and certain functions, from complaints or enquiries. By taking advantage of AI tools, the Civil Service can develop more effective processes that benefit people, society and the economy.

53%



Digital transformation

More and more public services look for efficiency and effectiveness through digitisation, which means Civil Service departments may need to work closer together to address these priorities. As digital transformation is an ongoing process, it is essential for staff to undergo continuous training to stay up to date with relevant skills and knowledge. This ensures they are well-equipped to adapt to the changing technological landscape and contribute to their department's growth and success.



Conclusions

Over the last few years, L&D teams have seen a rise in staff and service demands but unchanged budgets and L&D team sizes. This has left L&D decision-makers under pressure to boost retention, improve morale and provide quality training that meets needs of all staff in their department.

Through our survey, we discovered L&D managers believe face-to-face training is most effective in central government and is a key part of the continuous upskilling process to compete with private sector salary competition.

We also learnt that L&D decision-makers are focusing less on technical skills and more on addressing the need for strong soft skills and agile leaders by favouring training on improving confidence, decision-making and project management.

During 2023 and 2024 L&D teams look to intensify their efforts to improve wellbeing and meet several challenges including increased service demands, technological growth and procurement constraints that hold back training approvals.

Public sector L&D teams have already overcome huge challenges in 2023, and with these insights, we hope L&D decision-makers can continue to provide their teams with high quality training that meets their needs and service demands.

Please contact us at enquiries@moderngov.com to find out more or become a subscriber on our website www.moderngov.com

Credits

Produced by Understanding ModernGov.

Statistics taken from a survey of central government
Learning and Development professionals conducted in July 2023.

www.moderngov.com

References

Fit for the Future? Rethinking the Public Sector Workforce,
Authority of the House of Lords.

Statista Average year-on-year growth of weekly earnings in the public
and private sectors in the United Kingdom from March 2001 to July 2023



Understanding ModernGov